A Coffee with **Kristin Ross**

On the continuations of May '68



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A coffee with Kristin Ross: On the continuations of May ’68

(A conversation with Kristin Ross and Kostas Savvopoulos, Alexandros Sxismenos, Yannis Ktenas, Yavor Tarinski, Nikos Ioannou, Ioanna Maravelidi, from the editorial team of Babylonia, during B-Fest 7, 2018)

Kostas Savvopoulos: Hi Kristin, we are glad having you with us today! The question with which I would like to begin is about something we were discussing earlier. The sixties were a time of uprisings and not just in the West but around the world, with intense social insurrections against different forms of oppression. Now in Greece the May ’68 in Paris holds the monopoly in this conversation. But I think that there have been some other instances in history, like for example the 1968 and 1969 meetings and uprisings that brought forward the Rainbow Coalition in the USA, bringing together the Black Panthers, the Young Lords and the Young Patriots, or the big general strikes in Mexico, which show a wider approach to the meaning of May ’68, than the May ’68 itself. On the issues of inclusiveness, of creating broader fronts, of uniting people that are under multiple forms of oppression. What do you say about this?

Kristin Ross: Well, it is a big question. You have to, as you say, decentralize the images that come to peoples’ minds which were put into place very powerfully by a whole industry of memory that I talked about in my book and which I wrote against. Which had to do with the

various forces that essentially colonized peoples' memories of '68. And, as you say, they have to do predominantly with the student leadership in Paris who went on to become almost a class of official memory functionaries and who, at the time, even within France, you don't even have to go outside of France, to make this argument initially, that the control of the narrative of '68 was massively in the hands of just a few people. If you look, for example, in 1988, 20 years after, this was the peak of their control. And when I say 'they' I am talking about student leaders that, for the most part, had denied their own past and who had converted to the values of the market. Who were busy creating careers for themselves, where they used their radical past as a kind of coin by which to then deny their radical past and have access to the media, to State recognition. The State was very very happy to support this kind of memory of '68.

Now, what has disappeared from that picture was the workers, the outskirts, while the entire country was involved, not just Paris. So you have all that broader experience, which, as you say, was of a broader insurrection, which was the largest mass movement of modern French history. All that has disappeared and it is narrowed down to the personal experience of just a few men. Who enlarged their own personal experience to make it generalized to the experience of a generation, right? And then you had the trope of the generation that comes in as the narrative.

Now, to go further to what you are talking about, then what completely disappears is anything outside of France. The situations in the USA that you mentioned, in Mexico, in Japan, in South America. It is Immanuel Wallerstein who was the first person to argue that, if '68 has any kind of significance at all, it is because it was a worldwide

event. And in order to have some kind of perception of it at a global level, you have to do a lot of dissection and transformation of the narrative tools that have been put into place it the ways that I have mentioned.

Alexandros Schismenos: That is very interesting. Like in the case of Jerry Rubin, who in the '80s said that 'we found out that money is the revolution, I' m coming to Wall street, let's make millions together'. This technique of authorities appropriating the past is evident in '68 but is a useful tool for more recent periods as well. One of the things that seem interesting to me is that this appropriation of memory can happen while the protagonists of '68 are still alive.

K.R. Yes. And they are themselves the tools of the appropriation.

A.S. In Greece this happened with Polytechneio, the student insurrection against the Junta in 1973, where some people managed to take positions of authority by exchanging their past as a coin. This managed to obscure the whole movement. And this also happens nowadays in the recent political discourse about December 2008. It was an insurrection that broke out in the whole of Greece, with marches and demonstrations against police stations in most cities of Greece. But nowadays the governing party, as well as the second, opposition party, are referring to the event as a time when Athens was burned, referring only to Athens, obscuring the reasons why and characterizing it as leftist, whereas the left was not there. So, whereas in history lessons we learn that the past is rigid and can't change, we have this State appropriation of the past. I saw in your book that you highlighted the different modes of temporality, the different temporalities that are created in and by these movements, the ZAD

movement for example, where you speak about duration. My question is how we could achieve a different collective temporality, while authority's priority is to appropriate the past every time, so as to justify itself. Should we create our own narrative, or try to break up theirs?

K.R. I think you have two questions in one. These are really two distinct questions. The one has to do with the State appropriation of the past, which is constant, which is ongoing. I can give you an example.

I received an e-mail from Macron's government, asking me to come to speak to them about '68. And I said, why? Why me and why do you want to speak about '68? And they said, the President wishes to celebrate and commemorate '68, all year long. And I thought, this is so extraordinary, to be that transparent about the will to just absorb the energy of these movements. So, I asked them, what does he want to celebrate? And the answers where amazing. 'The modernization of France', the 'end of illusion', the 'end of utopia'. So, the celebration of a purely neo-liberal vision of the '60s. And I said, well in that case, you have my book if you are interested on how an official memory of a leftist event gets constructed, you have my book, you can just read it, I don't need to talk to you. And they were very insulted and they sent me an insulting e-mail, just like that. They broke all protocol and I have the e-mails.

So, there is that. Your other question, about the actual temporality of situations like the ZAD, that interests me enormously and it is one of the reasons why I have returned there so frequently. Because I like the way time moves there. And the way that what happens to time when

you are not, say, working for a salary. Obviously we are not talking about a situation that is entirely outside of the State, outside of capitalist temporality, but there is a way in which time moves differently, because salary labour has been pushed to the outskirts of peoples' life. And that means, that, for example, interruptions are different, or what counts as an interruption is different. Because people engage in a task and everybody works on a task and you are constantly interrupted by people who need something, or the horses have escaped, so you have to stop what you are doing and catch the horses, and then someone comes over and says that we need a text right now, about what is the demonstration in Nantes. And so you stop and you write the text, but you see, none of that could happen if you were pushing a time-clock. So the flow of time, the flow of peoples' pursuits is very different.

A.S. I like the importance you give on the concept of time and the concept of lived experience. Because there is this dominant perception of time being imposed to us and the utopia of escaping time altogether, but I think the important thing is that these examples show that we can create a common temporality. This is a basic question, because the way that authority handles society's sense of temporality influences not only daily life, but also our perception of ourselves. And I think that this new subjectivity that you describe, that emerges is associated with this sort of free public time that accompanies free public space.

Yannis Ktenas: The way that they deal with temporality in their book [he refers to N. Ioannou and Al. Schismenos book After Castoriadis] is pretty close to your own opinion. That was very interesting for me.

Yavor Tarinski: I would like to direct the discussion to a field that I believe is very important and you have analyzed and you spoke about also yesterday. I would start by saying that after 2010, with the emergence of the movement of the squares, the Occupy, the Indignados in Spain and the wave that followed, many of the traditional political organizations felt kind of disoriented, because they saw people gathering at the squares and trying to make politics and democracy from below without creating a homogenous ideological identity. And I think this is really a question that many of us ask. How should our social movements continue in such a post-ideological environment? And I find it very interesting that you find such cases in the Larzac, in Japan during the '60s and in the ZAD now. Where they search democracy amongst diverse groups of people, however the target of these democracies does not try to create an ideological identity by which to unite all, to melt the individuals into one homogenous whole. But it maintains the autonomy of the individual and creates also social autonomy. I would like you to elaborate further on this question, because I find it very important today.

K.R. Yes, to take the two French examples, there is already a progression from the Larzac to the ZAD. The Larzac was perhaps the first, well, the reason I see in it the beginning of something new is that it was the first time that hundreds thousands of people converged from all over the country and beyond to support these farmers. This meant that there were farmers, there were regional separatists, there were Gandhians, anti-violent people, there were people who wanted to overthrow the State, an amazing ideological panoply of people coming together this time. Now, in the Larzac the farmers were in control. The farmers led the movement. It was their movement, everyone else was supporting them.

The distance between the Larzac and the ZAD is that difference. In the ZAD you had the same degree of varieties of people and even a greater degree of variety, but no one is leading. The farmers are not in charge there. No social group is directing, making the decisions, so that is already a step in the direction that you are talking about. And this is also a very big difference from these kinds of movements in the Americas where, for example at Standing Rock the indigenous people were in charge. It was their land and everyone else was in a supporting role.

So, that's why I have become very interested in mechanisms of decision-making, of projecting a future and of simply living together and sharing space that is going on at the ZAD.

Y.K. I was very interested in what you said in the closing phrases of your speech. They were really nice and, in a way, moving, because, as I see it, in real political life you have people coming together, defying the categories and the separations which capitalism and the State impose, and in a sense, they create, they invent or re-invent forms of being together, of common life. And we could say that if this is the essence, let's say, of politics, this is also a pretty good response, a pretty good answer against identity politics. I would like you to comment on that, given that you are also from and you live in the U.S. where identity politics is pretty much the new tendency.

K.R. Well, I think from the very beginning, going back to what interested me about '68, it is this process whereby people abandoned for the most part their social functions during that period of time. Students stopped studying, workers stopped working, farmers stopped farming, artists, they stopped painting but they made posters, but, you

know, they weren’t in their studios alone trying to paint. So, you already have these talks about the petty bourgeois distribution of roles and places. And in this period of ’68 one characteristic is people’s willingness to abandon that distribution and go in excess of what anchors their identity, to essentially abandon it for a while. So, if you take that further, then the kind of new political intelligence that something like the ZAD represents is a furtherance of that tendency in the sense that, in order to achieve the kind of breakdown of the ideological rigidity that you are talking about, you need to become somewhat practiced in disidentifying from all of the elements that anchor our social lives and our identities within society.

Y.K. Yes, and that doesn’t mean that I stop being Yannis or you stop being Kristin but in a way we overcome it and recreate it.

K.R. Yes.

K.S. On this concept of identitarian politics, it seems like the late capitalism period that we are drifting through…

K.R. Drifting? It is an interesting verb.

K.S. When society is fragmented and is creating fragmented and schizoid people, identitarian politics comes as a fragmented answer to a fragmented problem. Which means we break apart our struggles and our politics, in order to confront the fragmented reality of late capitalism. What is really interesting about what you said earlier is that there is a need to view things and reality in a different way, in order to move away from this fragmented image. And not just participate in movements or create some form of community just to stand up to something, as a direct approach, but also to understand what you are

standing up against and at the same time try to create the conditions for these multiple oppressions to stop existing. Do you have any examples in mind in contemporary societies that fit this profile?

K.R. I think we have been talking about that, haven't we? I mean, I always go back to what Marx said about the Paris Commune, where he said, and I think it is actually the best analysis of the Commune in just a phrase. He said that what they accomplished, what was important about what they did was not any laws they passed, any governmental decrees that they managed to put into effect, what was important is simply their working existence. And that's it, the working existence is what we strive for, by 'working existence' he is saying the way that they inhabited the struggle, the way that they managed to organize and come to terms with their lived existence together. That's it, that's all politics really is about. And so, what interested me about something like a contemporary version of the commune form like the ZAD is that they inhabit the struggle, there is no distinction between living daily life and fighting. And in order to inhabit a struggle over a long duration as they have, you constantly have to transform yourself. You have to transform yourself in order to transform the situation that you share and you have to transform your own identity, your own personal position. So, it's not really about a political view or a form of organizing, it is really about a lived existence. Does that answer your question?

K.S. Not just as acting agents, but as true living beings.

K.R. Yes, as living beings. It is changing everyday life, and, again, it goes back to people like Henri Lefebvre, who was really great on this theme. And his interpretation of the Paris Commune really did shift things

over towards that phrase of Marx. And Lefebvre's own phrase was the transformation of everyday life. That you begin with everyday life, you don't begin with a goal in the distant future.

Y.T. And to elaborate on that, the change of everyday life, like what happened in the Commune and what happened all over the world during 1968, was this attack on bureaucratically imposed roles, to which we referred earlier. In neoliberal capitalism today, while we are always bombarded with this idea that we live in a post-bureaucratic society, we actually see a further and deepening fragmentation of our relations, of our lives. And I think this is similar to what we find in Ranciére, in his analysis in his book Proletarian Nights, where he says that the most dangerous workers were not the ones singing revolutionary songs, but the ones that tried to write poetry in the night and think philosophically. So, I think this is the essence of politics, to break the heteronomy that we have now and to integrate everything into a whole, a new kind of common social life based on politics and common decision-making.

K.R. Exactly. You saw that very clearly in the movements of France around Nuit Debout, about which people don't talk any longer, even though it was something very recent, was precisely this intense need or desire for some kind of community. And you could see that in the way that people came together every night, despite being chased away by the cops every morning. The fact was that they needed some sort of shared space in which to overcome the kind of anomie that you are speaking about and fragmentation.

A.S. I would like to elaborate more on this point. In the classical revolutionary texts there is a strong importance given to the division of society. Division of interests, division of…

K.R. Labor.

A.S. Yes, division of labor. However, for a division to be present there must be a preexisting unity. So, we have a preexisting unity, for example Castoriadis calls it the unity of the dominant social imaginary significations of capitalism, that unifies even the dissidents. So, we see situations where a free collectivity is constituted by diversity, significations or identifications like "I'm a vegan" or "I'm an anarchist" tend to become trivial. So, there are other significations that unify these collectivities. And my question is, what is the primary signification that could unify and which could lead us to a different project? If we say "it's humanity", it sounds trivial, whereas if we say "just the workers" or "just the leftists", then it is very exclusive.

K.R. I like to sort of deal in specific situations, so, again, in the case of the ZAD the unity was provided by opposition to the airport. So it was a clear project and that brought people together. As time went by, that changed. And here is the importance of duration. It is that, as time went by, they discovered not just what they were opposed to, but also what they were for. And what they were for was the defending of what they had become. In other words, of the kind of community, of the kind of collective that they had become, in very real terms. The years of shared experience, the different people that had come in, the memories and again, the physical relationship to the land, which they are constantly working on and also the battles with the police. So there is a change in what Bachelard calls the muscular consciousness of the

land which has become part of the value that you are defending. And still, you have eclecticism within the group, nothing of that has solidified as homogenous.

A.S. Yes, I think it is very important to stress this point, because we live in a society with the Internet, where there is now this new trend of de-corporealized politics which is very close to identity politics. Because, without being there, without the common ground and without your body being there, like Ranciére said, it is not politics. Politics requires both the body and the mind to be there.

K.R. I agree with that.

A.S. So it is important that you stress this point since we live in an era when politics seem to become abstract, while, as you say, it is specific. I think it is one of the most important points at our discussion.

Y.T. I think something that you mentioned yesterday when referring to the ZAD is this kind of shift that you urged for, from politics of resistance towards politics of defense. That is, let's say, the type of resistance is a more traditional Marxist kind of view that "we prepare for the revolution and afterwards we start building", whereas the type of defense is to try to build from now and to defend it and prepare for the clash that is imminent because it emerges in a world that is existing and in this way it is creating something new. How important do you think is this? Should we emphasize it?

K.R. I am more and more interested in that distinction, because, you know, when Donald Trump was elected in the United States, there was a crescendo of everyone saying "we must resist, we must resist." It was completely useless. Completely useless because it was a recognition of

utter powerlessness. If you start from defense, you are starting from something you love and you have to start there. And especially now, given the state of the ecological catastrophe that we are all living in, you have to start somewhere and you have to start from what it is that you cherish. And that, already in itself is a way for people to achieve far more solidarity than they can when being told by the Internet that they must resist Donald Trump.

Y.T. And I think this moves beyond all this thing that people like Enzo Traverso speak about, the left melancholy, the need to return to past forms of communism…

K.R. As a person I am very fond of Enzo Traverso, but I find his melancholic tune to be not deeply interesting. And there are versions of that pretty much everywhere in the Left now. There is a great deal of emphasis on tragedy and melancholia. A lot of it coming out of the situations in post-independent states in Africa, so that a lot of post-colonial melancholy and tragedy that those states did not achieve a greater state of democracy, something like that. In the United States post-colonial theory has become just a weeping festival, where everyone is in tears constantly.

A.S. We have that in Greece as well, but in another context. We have what we call the poetry of defeat.

K.R. The poetry of defeat, yes.

A.S. And it is the poetry of those defeated after the Civil War and until now, well it was until the Junta fell, this period, but this poetry is still distinctive of the Left. And this peculiar pride of the Left, namely that we are defeated but also proud of it, is paralyzing.

K.R. It is completely paralyzing and you see it in many tendencies of the kind of nihilistic anarchism, for example, which is simply another version of the passion for defeat.

A.S. I would like to pose now a different question. I understand completely how important the examples you refer to are, as well as examples like Chiapas or Rojava. There is, however, a difference between the Commune or the French Revolution and movements like ZAD. I mean regarding the central approach to the question of power. The Commune or the French Revolution did not leave a place for State power. It is a deep problematic issue that is raised alongside modernity as well, the question of power. It seems that movements can acquire a sort of power in the sense of the ability to transform their lives and a space around them, even a world around them. But there is this power of authority claimed by the State, which is the power to judge what is right and what is wrong, what is legal, the power of the law. In what tension can the movements bring themselves against this power? It is a question of polity, to which I don't think that there is one straight answer, I would not expect an answer like, they should do this or that. But do you think that this is a tension that can be resolved in a way of parallel worlds or a tension that ultimately will lead to a clash? I think that always the capitalists are those that impose their violence.

K.R. Sure. But I think that each of these, if you take Chiapas, if you take the situation in Indian reservations in the US, which are not part of the nation nor their own nation, these are very interesting examples of territories that are already in some kind of ambiguous relationship to the State. That's an enormous potential, and something like what the ZAD themselves created for themselves, was a form of semi-secession.

This is the activity that I'm interested in, is this kind of secessionary movement. I no longer believe in seizing State power.

A.S. I agree. And this is interesting because this kind of semi-secession is also inclusive for all and it is not a secession excluding people.

K.R. That's right. It's not like a Franciscan monastery or something like that, where everyone has removed themselves from the world, but they are all the same.

A.S. So, these movements are not outside of society.

K.R. Right. And I go back to the anarchist thinkers that I examine in the final chapters of my book Communal Luxury, and these included people like William Morris in England and a range of Communards who were interacting with Kropotkin, Gustav Lefrançais, and Elisée Reclus. All these people were extremely focused on the question of secession and the creation of these communities that precisely were not isolated and turned in on themselves. So that's the other part. They are semi-secessionary in that they are removing themselves in certain aspects. And that's why dual power is still a useful practice or idea, because it is really about the creation of an autonomy that includes great aspects of self-reliance and the development of the skills that you need to achieve that.

A.S. It is like this idea that we have, of the recreation of public space. Open public space and social spaces like Nosotros or social events like B-fest, that are public, open but however they are considered territories, imaginary territories where the State and capital don't have a place. Everybody has a place but the official of the State and the capital.

K.R. Yes.

A.S. So we think that it is a division that demonstrates that the State is not society, but an authoritarian mechanism that enforces itself on society. So this is made visible by removing ourselves from that authority and showing peoples' power. That is what Yavor discussed with Ranciere, as well. However, the use of the term "dual power" in Greece has been associated with left governments and NGOs. Or Venezuela's example, on the other hand.

Y.K. And some people thought yesterday that it has Marxist roots and Marxist connotations.

K.R. It was Lenin who used the term first, but he was talking about a very specific situation that was transitional when the workers' councils were battling with the State for power in 1917. But there is another, more anarchist idea about dual power, which simply has to do with setting up alternative structures to State structures, with the ultimate idea that, at some point, the State will become redundant.

A.S. That is very interesting. We wanted to clarify that, because you know…

K.R. I understand. I didn't realize that.

Y.T. I would like to make only one comment on this, that we see the power of words, and how, despite of the context that somebody places, one word can be misunderstood by many people. And I think that Castoriadis made the hard decision in the 1970s to abandon the term "socialism", because he saw that no matter how he described it - that it had no relation with what the nature of the USSR actually was - and while he was closer to libertarian depictions of socialism, he saw

that he could not communicate properly with people while using this term. Despite all the emphasis on the direct democratic character of autonomy, when he spoke of socialism they automatically referred him to the Soviet Union.

A.S. Or like Bookchin with anarchism.

K.R. Yes, it's exactly the same. In a way it shows the importance of not beginning with concepts. And since I was not trained in philosophy or political science it is very easy for me to not begin with the concept. I like to begin rather with the question of subjectivity and with the coming into subjectivity.

Nikos Ioannou: On the issue of Zapatistas and Chiapas, these communities were part of a traditional world where the State hasn't been completely and fully imposed and was not fully recognized by the people. So they were able to move to this kind of semi-secession. While in the ZAD or elsewhere, let's say urban or social movements in societies where the State has completely imposed its power it is different, because there the State can use the force of weapons or of the law.

K.R. But the State of Mexico has treated the Zapatistas with brutal violence as well.

N.I. Well, the traditional indigenous people had not internalized the authority of the State. They were in a way abandoned.

K.R. Well, I agree with you in that they are different, but not at the level of State violence, because the Mexican State has been extraordinary violent towards the Zapatistas. I agree with you that there is a difference between people in over-developed countries who

are coming together from various kinds of experiences like at the ZAD or the NO TAV movement in Italy. That is very different from the indigenous communities in the Americas. But I'm interested in converging them around this idea of defense of the territory and the other elements that I mentioned. They are different, but they are also not unrelated.

A.S. I wanted to speak about the Greek experience, so that we can share our experience as well. In Greece over the 21st century, and you can correct me, we have three types of different politics, I would say, from the people. We had one type that was the December 2008 riots, which was, in my opinion, a reflex due to years of disassociation with the State, because in Greece the State has always been theirs not ours. A disassociation which broke out with an insurrection that was different from the riots in Europe because it was not motivated by the excluded parts of society, but, since a student was killed, the students was the most prominent of the demonstrations. The students were those that inspire all those people to go out, the students besieged police stations. The second type was the Occupy movement in 2011, which in Greece had more severe characteristics than the Spanish example, because it was more political. The main discourse was on direct democracy and the main problem of the people was how to implement forms of direct democracy. And the reaction of the State was brutal. It attacked the people constantly, for example in June the State ran out of tear gas and had to buy more from Israel.

K.R. Really? They had to buy tear gas from Israel? Thank God for Israel. They always have enough to borrow from. (Laughs)

A.S. Yes. But the people did not leave the square, they came back and cleaned it. There were thousands of people and it was a form of resistance that Greek society experienced for a first time. Not attacking, but remaining there.

And the third type, which is the most enduring type, because the other examples lasted for about a month or so, are those territories where we see local societies moving against international corporate interests, like the Gold mining in Halkidiki and the Oil mining in West Greece.

K.R. But don't you think there is a relation between the second and the third? In other words, that the Occupy movement enabled and empowered people to try to do the third? Because I was struck with Redneck Revolt, when their speaker here said that he came out of the Occupy movement and he's essentially now doing this kind of territorial work.

A.S. Well, the first and the second have a trend that connects them. Because it was the students rioting and not political professionals, that gave society a sense of self-assertion, a sense of belonging in solidarity. The second, the Occupy, gave society a sense of free public space and deliberation, and the third is more practical and daily. But the history shows that the third type precedes the others, territorial battles against capital and State come first. The movement against the Mesochora dam in Acheloos river began in 1985. But in Greece these have not created something like the ZAD, a communal way of life.

K.R. That is why the rural aspect is important because there is space, which is not that valuable. The space of the Larzac was described by the French State as a desolate plateau occupied by a few farmers vaguely raising a few sheep and who, more or less, lived in the Middle

Ages. That was what the Secretary of the Interior said, how he described that territory. This is what I meant by giving value to something that has no value. Many of these rural areas are considered valueless. The ZAD is wetlands, which means that it is very bad agricultural land. And yet, they have worked it into some kind of agricultural situation. That's why I think these urban occupations were destined to be short-lived, because the space in the city is so precious.

Y.K. Kristin, I was very interested in what you said yesterday about values and transvaluation, and the way in which you referred to the same issue just now: we love something, we value something, we can change the value we attribute to it. So I would like to hear some more things about this concept and I think that this concept, the transvaluation of values was used by Nietzsche. Do you owe something to Nietzsche besides the word?

K.R. Maybe. Maybe in ways that I don't really recognize myself, but I wouldn't call it a concept, again. It is more of a strategy or a practice. This idea of giving excessive value to something that is not valued by the market. It is not so much that it is undervalued by the market, it is not using the market as a scale for determining value.

The example that I come back to is something that happened in the Paris Commune, where the artisanal workers, the craftspeople united with fine artists to write a manifesto, demanding to be included under the category of artists. They were saying, why shouldn't artisanal work have the same value? And by merely posing that question, they undermined the hierarchy at the center of the social and artistic world at that time. Because artisanal craftspeople were not legally allowed to call their work 'art'. They were not allowed to sell it. They were not

allowed to sign their name to it. That's how extreme the opposition between what counted as fine art and what counted as handicraft, you know lace making or pottery or any of those things. The first thing that they did in the Commune is to say that this is a completely irrelevant distinction. All artistic labor is the same, we are not concerned with what counts as art, we simply want to enable the conditions for art everywhere. So that, I think is what, I don't know if Nietzsche would call it transvaluation of values, but I do.

Y.T. What you refer to is a kind of self-instituting, that is reclaiming the right to institute how a society understand itself, taking it away from the central authorities and dispersing it properly to all members of society.

K.R. Exactly. And part of that means playing with what counts as valuable, what is wealth itself, what is social wealth, and rethinking it.

N.I. I would like to return to something that you talked about, Kristin, in your interview in Babylonia magazine, regarding the anti-globalization movement, and prior to it, the workers' strikes of 1995 in France and the connection between the two. I participated in the anti-globalization demonstrations, like in 2000 in Prague and 2001 in Gevona, after Seattle 1999, where American anarchists also participated. What I understood from this movement was that the workers' movement was not actually present there. Some syndicates and unions were of course there and participated in the demonstrations, but it was as if they were not existent, because the meaning of those demonstrations was something different. And as an example I would like to refer to the fact that was prevail on an organizing level in Europe was the aformalistic paradigm of the Italian

Ya Basta, which proposed a new way of collective organizing that, despite that they had leftist origins, was a different perception somewhat beyond the traditional. There was also a contradictory case among the anti-globalization movement, in Europe, since in Seattle it was different, but in Genova, for example, where the movement climaxed and also ended, there was a wide range of people moving against globalization, from Christians to the Greek Communist Party, which demonstrated shouting "Earthquake, earthquake, Communism". Completely contradictory things. So, there is not a central workers' movement to be found in those demonstrations, but a multifaceted, diverse and sometimes contradictory movement that does not have a specific goal, but a vague understanding of some things regarding the new situation that is coming. It does not have a specific goal but also carries within it information related to the Paris Commune of 1871 and to the May of 1968.

My question is, how are the workers' movement and the 1995 strikes in France related to the anti-globalization movement, when we take under consideration that already before 1995, back in the 1980s and actually after May 1968 the workers' movement gained much. The workers in the Netherlands and France, during the '80s gain the right to part time employment, something that nowadays workers, at least in Greece, are opposed to. The European workers gained so much that they want time to consume. I think, and I would like your opinion on this, Kristin, that the workers' movement, being a traditional movement, does not have a role among the new political movements that emerge in Europe. What is your opinion?

K.R. Well, to go back to the very beginning, to the way I talk about how the workers on the streets, during the strikes in 1995 in France re-

awakened something about 1968 that had disappeared through the entire 1980s. And I would stand by that, because it was a very basic difference. If you remember the 1980s in France, there was a complete pulse unique that had everything to do with France adjusting itself to the hegemony of the United States. That was extremely monolithic until those labor strikes in ’95. That was the first that broke the ice and that made people remember 1968. Because they had forgotten it, it had been completely obliterated from their memory. So, I am not a political scientist or a political theorist and what interests me in a situation like ’68 is when the past becomes visible, when does it become vital to the present and in what form. What are the ways in which it is hidden by clichés or banalities. So, this is a different kind of response to your question.

To get directly to what I think you are asking about, the reason why I am interested, for example, in the commune form and why my work has focused on that in various places is precisely because the commune form raises questions about everyday life, about sociability, that are not answered by the workers’ movement, and especially not today. The workers’ movement represents a very narrow kind of perspective, compared to something like the commune form, which is very socially inclusive. It includes all people. It includes unemployed people, it includes babies, it includes animals, it includes all the parameters of social life. For that reason I think it is more politically rich as a recurrent vernacular form whose history we can trace.

Ioanna Maravelidi: In relation with the contemporary movements that we have mentioned, we could see some relations and similarities between the Indignados or Occupy movement and May 1968. In terms that these were global movements, they were asking for more

democracy, they were inclusive and brought people massively to the streets. What would you say about this?

K.R. I think you are right and I think that you just named the similarities. They were both profoundly concerned with direct democracy, with establishing a community and they were international.

I.M. Almost 50 years apart from each other...

K.R. And I would add, with nothing much comparable in between. So it is very vivid, their similarities, because I can't think of anything in between that resembles that kind of scale. The scale was enormous.

N.I. Like Ioanna, I would like to refer to the issue of May 1968. My question is, could we say that May 1968 expressed, on the one hand, the recognition of the defeat of the socialist revolution and on the other, the effort to create a real breach on the established social reality? And to give some more context, when I was young, me and my whole generation in the decades of 1970 and 1980, those of us interested in politics, perceived May '68 as a great criticism of the traditional movement, a refutation of the political party, and a criticism of the workers' movement, while the phrase: Imagination in Power, had more meaning to us as regards Imagination rather than Power. We perceived May as an insurrection of imagination and critique towards the party and the syndicate. It was an insurrection against the system but also against the established anti-system. Of course, what we later saw as the official narrative was Cohn-Bendit on the one hand, who expressed the integration of these ideas in the system, rejuvenating the established system, while on the other hand, terrorism. I mean armed struggle, in Germany and in France, by Action

Directe, and most of all in Italy. I would explain both those sides as a consequence of May, not in the notion that they expressed the meaning of the insurrection, which they didn't, but as the last song of the traditional left worldwide. So, should we perceive May '68 as the defeat of the traditional and the beginning of something new?

K.R. I agree with that, that this is the official narrative, which is why I, who come out of literary studies, am always interested on who is telling the story and from what perspective and who is at the center of the narrative. So, a very different picture emerges if you shift the scene in the way that I tried to do last night, for example by focusing on the farmers in the Larzac. They are very much part of 1968, however they don't bear any relationship to the official narrative. And I think that is a very important thing to do, you have to tell these stories very differently, in order to perceive things differently.

Y.K. From different standpoints, let's say?

K.R. Yes. Exactly, you have to push Cohn-Bendit completely off the stage and put someone like Bernard Lambert, in the center. And this is not because I think that Bernard Lambert is more important, or neglected, or anything like that. I'm not doing that for that reason, I'm doing it simply to perceive things differently.

Y.K. As you wrote, if you start with the State, you 'll end up with the State. If you start differently, maybe you 'll find another way. Thank you very much for your patience.

K.R. Well, thank you for your questions, they were wonderful.

